

John

Lesson #10

The Good Shepherd

(10: 1 – 11: 54)

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Review

Lesson #9 opened with the story of the woman caught in adultery and Jesus' surprise response to it. The story then turned to the second of seven "I am" statements:

1. "I am the bread of life" (6: 35)
2. "I am the light of the world" (8: 12)
3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (10: 7)
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10: 11)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6)
7. "I am the true vine" (15:1)

The statement stood in sharp contrast to the darkness of the world and to the utter blindness of the religious leaders who refused to accept Jesus, who found his statements preposterous, and who thought him to be stark-raving mad.

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Preview

Lesson #10 opens with two more “I am” statements, presenting Jesus as the good shepherd; it closes with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and his stunning 3rd “I am” statement, *“I am the resurrection and the life”*:

1. “I am the bread of life” (6: 35)
2. “I am the light of the world” (8: 12)
3. “I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)
4. “I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)
5. “I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

We know from the synoptic gospels that Jesus raised two people from the dead in Galilee: Jairus’ 12-year old daughter (Matthew 9: 18-26; Mark 5: 21-43; Luke 8: 4-56); and the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7: 11-17).

Preview, cont.

Neither of these appears in John's gospel; conversely, raising Lazarus does not appear in the synoptic gospels.

Raising Lazarus is the centerpiece of John's gospel. It provides the supreme example of Jesus as the good shepherd, and it also offers conclusive evidence that Jesus and the Father are one (10: 30). In addition, it sets the stage for Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion, for when word spreads that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin holds an emergency session, and *"from that day on they planned to kill him"* (11: 53). As Peter's confession of faith and the Transfiguration mark the turning point in the synoptic gospels, so does Jesus raising Lazarus mark the turning point in John's gospel.



As we enter Lesson #10, Jesus continues his conversation with the Pharisees who had been questioning him about the man born blind in the previous scene. In a pointed, accusatory fashion they said to him, *“Surely we are not also blind, are we?”* To which Jesus replied, *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains”* (9: 40-41). In other words he tells them, “If you were ignorant you might have an excuse for not believing, but since you claim to see, you have no excuse, so you remain in your sin.”

Once said, Jesus immediately shifts to metaphor and addresses them in a remarkable and memorable discourse:

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“Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers. Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, ‘Amen, Amen, I say to you, **I am the gate for the sheep.** All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

(10: 1-10)

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Here, Jesus introduces the 3rd of his 7 “I am” statements, “I am the gate for the sheep.”

1. “I am the bread of life” (6: 35)
2. “I am the light of the world” (8: 12)
3. **“I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)**
4. “I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)
5. “I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

After Jesus brings light into the world in the person of the man born blind, he shifts his metaphor from “light” to “sheep,” with himself as the “gate” of the sheep pen and later as the “good shepherd” who watches over the sheep.



This might seem like a strange thing to do, but it is wholly appropriate, given that Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, those in Jerusalem who are leaders and teachers of the people.

Israel's leaders were often likened to shepherds and the people to sheep, a comparison that emerged from the time of David, the shepherd-king who, when viewed typologically, prefigures the ultimate Shepherd-King, Jesus Christ.

In this scene, Jesus presents himself as *the gate of the sheep pen*. Sheep wandering the hills was—and is—a common sight in Israel, but at night the shepherd rounds them up, herding them into a pen, typically made of stones, with one entrance that could be guarded, keeping the sheep safe.

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Shepherds with their flocks in the Negev, Israel.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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An ancient rock sheep pen on Craigmoddie Fell in county Galloway, Scotland.

Photography by John and Loretta Layman

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Often, sheep from several different flocks were placed in a single pen, but each flock would respond only to the voice of its own shepherd, not to the voice of others.

The metaphor suggests that we are sheep, and that God has a safe and secure place for us, but we can only enter that place through one gate, Jesus Christ.



That's an inventive metaphor, not one that would spring to mind immediately.

I wouldn't have thought of it right away, either.

Ha! That is so obvious!

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"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. **I am the good shepherd,** and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."
(10: 11-18)

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Here, Jesus introduces the 4th of his 7 “I am” statements, “I am the good shepherd.”

1. “I am the bread of life” (6: 35)
2. “I am the light of the world” (8: 12)
3. “I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)
4. **“I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)**
5. “I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

After presenting himself as “the gate for the sheep,” Jesus shifts smoothly, presenting himself as “the good shepherd,” in contrast to the Pharisees and false teachers who are “the bad shepherds,” little more than hired hands concerned only with themselves, leaving the sheep to ravenous wolves!

Oh, oh! Where's
my good shepherd
when I need him?



Yumm. Lamb
chops!



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The “good shepherd,” coming to the rescue!

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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According to Ana, who took this photo in rural Turkey, a very good shepherd!

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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“Again, there was a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, ‘He is possessed and out of his mind; why listen to him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one possessed; surely a demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?’”

(10: 19-21)



Once more Jesus' words and actions drive a wedge between people: those who understand and those who don't; those who believe and those who don't; those who think he is from God and those who don't.

As C.S. Lewis pointed out, Jesus is either exactly who he says he is, the Son of God; or he is a madman, a demon from hell.

There is no middle ground in John.

“The feast of the dedication was then taking place in Jerusalem [the 8-day feast of lights, Hanukkah; 3 months after Tabernacles]. It was winter. And Jesus walked about in the temple area on the Portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. **The Father and I are one.**’

(10: 22-30)

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“The Jews again picked up rocks to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods’? If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? . . .

“If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize [and understand] that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.’ [Then] they tried again to arrest him, but he escaped from their power. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, ‘John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true.’ And many there began to believe in him.”

(10: 31-42)

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Jesus returns to Bethany, on the other side [east side] of the Jordan River.

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The east bank of the Jordan River as it flows south into the Dead Sea.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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We now move to the centerpiece of John's gospel, Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, which provides the supreme example of Jesus as the good shepherd, and it also offers conclusive evidence that Jesus and the Father are one (10: 30).

In addition, raising Lazarus sets the stage for Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion, for when word spreads that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin holds an emergency session, and *"from that day on they planned to kill him"* (11: 53).

As Peter's confession of faith and the Transfiguration mark the turning point in the synoptic gospels, so does Jesus raising Lazarus mark the turning point in John's gospel.

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Raising Lazarus is the last and greatest of Jesus' 7 "signs," and it triggers the 5th of his "I am" statements:

"I am the resurrection and the life."

(11: 25)

“Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him, saying, ‘Master, the one you love is ill.’ When Jesus heard this he said, ‘This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was . . .

We have a lot to say about this story, so let's get started:

- Mary, Martha and Lazarus live in Bethany, a day's journey from where Jesus is, on the east side of the Jordan River.



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From Jericho the old Roman Road ascends 3,400 feet in elevation to Jerusalem.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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The road clings to the southern wall of the Wadi Qelt, with a precipitous vertical drop on the right.

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Bethany, home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, is 1.5 miles east of Jerusalem on the south-eastern slope of the Mount of Olives.

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- **Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus at a dinner party that we will read about in John 12: 1-11.**
- **When Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that Lazarus was ill, it takes the messenger 1 day to travel from Bethany to Jesus, 17.3 miles.**
- **After receiving the message, Jesus waits for 2 days.**
- **The word “love” is important. The sisters tell Jesus, “The one you love is ill” (11: 3) and John tells us that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (11: 5).**
 - **The word for “love” that Mary and Martha use is φίλος, [fe-le'-o], as in “friendly,” or “brotherly love.”**
 - **The word used of Jesus’ feelings toward Mary, Martha and Lazarus is ἀγάπη [a-ga-pa'-o] the highest, divine form of love.**

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“Then after this he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. He said this, and then told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him.’ So the disciples said to him, ‘Master, if he is asleep he will be saved’ . . .



- After 2 days, Jesus decides to go back to Jerusalem, a 1-day journey up the 17.3 mile Roman Road.
- His disciples say, in effect, “Are you out of your mind? They were going to stone you there!” But Jesus is confident, using the light/dark imagery to illuminate his position.
- When Jesus says that Lazarus is “asleep,” he uses the word κοιμάω [*koi-ma'-o*] as a euphemism for “dead,” as in “putting your dog to sleep.”

“But Jesus was talking about death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, ‘Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him.’ So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go and die with him.’”

(11: 1-16)

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- Jesus tells them plainly that Lazarus is dead, ἀποθνήσκω, [*a-po-than'-s-ko*]. We get the word “apotheosis” from it.

- And with that, Jesus heads for Bethany.

- Thomas, called “Didymus” (which means “twin”), says, “*Let us also go and die with him.*”

- We need to listen to the tone of Thomas’ remark. It’s not one of willingly marching off a cliff; it’s one of Thomas throwing his hands in the air in resignation (and a bit of exasperation), saying, “Oh, well, I guess we’ll all go die, too!” and shaking his head as he goes.

“When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus told her, ‘**I am the resurrection and the life**; whoever believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.’”

(11: 17-27)

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•When Jesus arrives, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Run the numbers:

- Mary and Martha sent a messenger to tell Jesus that Lazarus was ill. It took the messenger one full day to get to Jesus;
- Jesus waits two days (that's 3 days, total);
- Jesus and his disciples travel to Bethany, a full-day's journey (that's 4 days total);
- When Jesus arrives at Bethany he learns that Lazarus has been in the tomb for 4 days;
- Which means that Lazarus had died shortly after the messenger left Mary and Martha, so *Lazarus was already dead when the messenger told Jesus that he was ill.*



•Martha knows absolutely that if Jesus had been present, Lazarus would not have died. She knows, too, that even now, with Lazarus four days in the tomb, Jesus can raise him, if he chooses. She knows without question that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

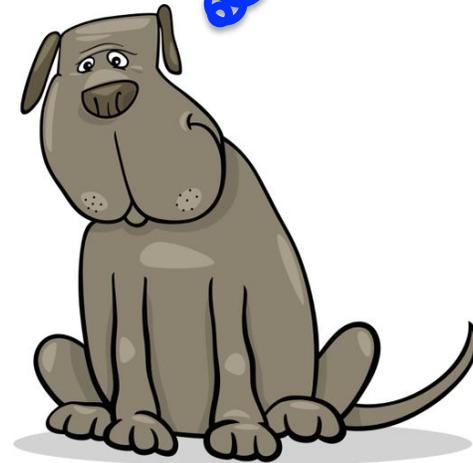
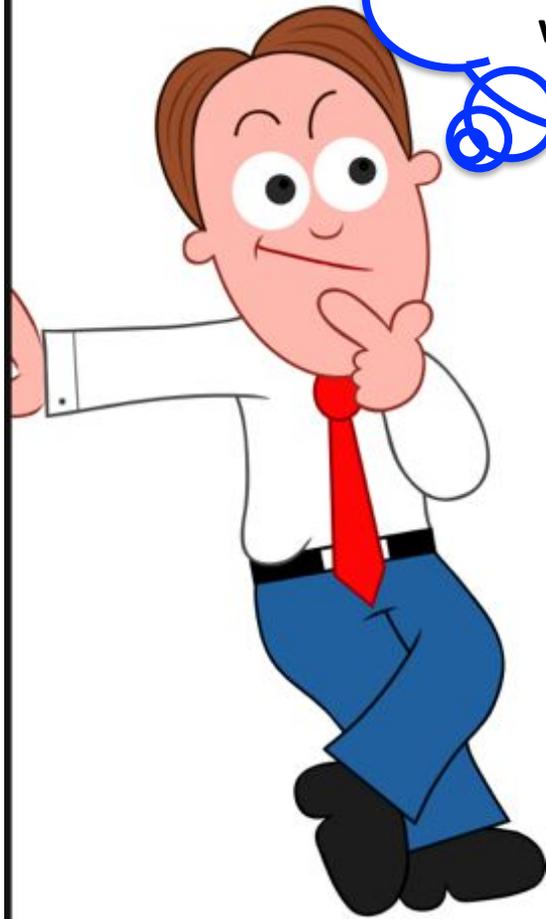
•And Jesus confirms Martha's belief when he utters the 5th of his 7 "I am" statements:

1. "I am the bread of life" (6: 35)
2. "I am the light of the world" (8: 12)
3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (10: 7)
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10: 11)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6)
7. "I am the true vine" (15:1)

“When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, ‘The teacher is here and is asking for you.’ As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Sir, come and see’ . . .

Notice how Mary's grief differs from Martha's. When Martha met Jesus her tone was almost accusatory, while Mary, dropping to her knees, barely speaks in a whisper, her heart broken.

I feel very sad.





• We read that Jesus became “perturbed” and “deeply troubled.” The words are ἔμβριμάομαι [*em-bre-ma'-o-mi*] “deeply angered” and ταραύσσω [*ta-ras'-so*], “profoundly troubled,” a seismic inner turmoil. This is a gut-wrenching, profound pain, welling up from the deepest recesses of a person’s heart, seeking escape in a primal, horrifying scream.

• Jesus shares in the pain and suffering of his friends, of those he loves—in the deepest sense of compassion, but even more, he is angry beyond words at the horror of sin and death . . . at the whole tragic, fallen human condition.

“And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him.’ But some of them said, ‘Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?’ So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, ‘Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days . . .



•The simple phrase ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus wept,” expresses the depth of Jesus’ anguish. These are *silent tears*, welling up from deep within. For audible weeping or lamentation John would have used the word ὀδυρμός [*od-oor-mos*’], “to lament loudly.”

•When we read again that Jesus was “perturbed”, the word is once more ἔμβριμάομαι [*em-bre-ma’-o-mi*] “deeply angered.”

•As a humorous sidebar in the rarefied world of biblical translation, when Martha says, “*Lord, by now there will be a stench . . .*,” the 1611 King James version reads colloquially: “Lord, by this time he stinketh!”

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“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, ‘Father, thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.’ And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, ‘Untie him and let him go.’

(11: 35-44)

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•This is an incredibly dramatic scene. The gathered crowd stands in bright sunlight before the bright limestone tomb as men slowly roll away the heavy stone. Jesus prays, barely audible. Inside, the tomb is dark, the smell of death oozing outward.

Suddenly, Jesus cries out in a loud voice: “Lazarus, come out!” The crowd gasps, holding their breath, eyes seeking to penetrate the darkness of the tomb: silence . . . then rustling . . . scraping . . . shuffling. Lazarus emerges, wraithlike, wrapped as a mummy, tightly bound, draped in a shroud, inching forward in his grave clothes, from the blackness of tomb into the light of day.

The stunned crowd stands, jaws agape. And Jesus commands, “Get those wrappings off of him.”

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**Duccio. *The Raising of Lazarus* (tempera and gold on panel), c. 1310.
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.**

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Only three men have raised the dead at this point in Scripture: Elijah, raises the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17: 17-22); Elisha raises the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4: 32-35) and now, Jesus raises Lazarus, who has been rotting in the tomb for four days. This is the centerpiece of John's gospel, Jesus' final "sign," offering conclusive evidence that he and the Father are one (10: 30).

Raising Lazarus also sets the stage for Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion, for when word spreads that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin holds an emergency session, and *"from that day on they planned to kill him"* (11: 53).

“Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and said, ‘What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone, all will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our land and our nation . . .



•The Jewish leadership clearly sees the danger Jesus poses in regard to the Roman Empire. The Jews—as with all the other religions and ethnicities in the Empire—were free to worship their own God in their own way, as long as they paid proper respect to the Roman gods and to the *pax Romana*. But they were not free to use their religion as a means of civil unrest or insurrection.

•If the people believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, it will ignite a revolution against Rome, a revolution that has been simmering for decades, and it does indeed explode in the catastrophic Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66-73, in which Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed and 1.2 million Jews die, the greatest catastrophe in Judaism until the Nazi holocaust of the 20th century.

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“But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.’ He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to kill him . . .



• Caiaphas the high priest is prescient when he says:

“You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.”

(11: 50)

• The word translated “it is better” is συμφέρω, [*sum-fe'-ro*] literally, it is “more expedient” that one man die than the whole nation perish.

• And, thus, the Sanhedrin puts a plan in motion to arrest Jesus quietly and have him put to death.

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“So Jesus no longer walked about in public among the Jews, but he left for the region near the desert, to a town called Ephraim, and there he remained with his disciples.”

(11: 45-54)

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. After the story of Jesus healing the man born blind, John transitions immediately into the two “shepherd” metaphors: “I am the gate for the sheep” and “I am the good shepherd.” Why ?
2. Sheep will respond only to the voice of their own shepherd. How does Jesus use this curious fact in his “good shepherd” discourse?
3. After hearing that Lazarus is sick, why does Jesus wait for two days before traveling to Bethany?
4. How do Mary and Martha’s responses to their brother’s death differ?
5. How does Jesus respond to the death of Lazarus?

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